

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-08 AGRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
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R 111237Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4962
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
USMISSION BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL MUNICH
USMISSION NATO
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
USDOC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 3218

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ECON, EAGR, PINT, SOCI, UR
SUBJECT: FOOD SUPPLY DIFFICULTIES

REFS: (A) LENINGRAD 212, (B) MOSCOW 2796, (C) MOSCOW 1889

SUMMARY. OUR OBSERVATIONS AND THOSE OF DIPLOMATIC AND SOVIET SOURCES WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN LEAD US TO SOME ADMITTEDLY SPECULATIVE GENERAL CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE PRESENT FOOD SUPPLY IN THE USSR. ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET FOOD SITUATION IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT DUE TO LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF RELIABLE INFORMATION AND RESTRICTIONS ON OBSERVATION CAPABILITY OF
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AMERICAN PERSONNEL. IT SEEMS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT IN PART AS A RESULT OF THE 1975 GRAIN FAILURE SOME SIGNIFICANT SHORTAGES HAVE EXISTED AND ARE STILL NOT FULLY OVERCOME. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND RUMORS, ADMITTEDLY LIMITED IN NUMBER AND SCOPE, OF TIGHT FOOD SUPPLIES, PARTICULARLY OF MEATS, WITH THE WORST CONDITIONS, AS USUAL, BEING INDICATED FOR NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS. WE CANNOT, HOWEVER, STATE HOW GENERAL OR

HOW PROLONGED THESE SHORTAGES MAY BE. WE CONSIDER IT HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT CONDITIONS IN AFFECTED LOCATIONS CONTINUE TO BE BAD BY WESTERN STANDARDS AND PERHAPS EVEN POOR BY COMPARISON WITH THE SOVIET SUPPLY SITUATION DURING MUCH OF THE 1973-75 PERIOD. THE EVIDENCE HOWEVER IS NOT UNIFORM NOR IS THERE AGREEMENT THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION IS GREATLY DIFFERENT THAN IN PREVIOUS YEARS. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME SCATTERED REPORTS OF UNREST, BUT THEY DO NOT CONSTITUTE A SERIOUS IMMEDIATE PROBLEM FOR THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET FOOD SITUATION REMAINS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT DUE TO THE LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF RELIABLE INFORMATION AND RESTRICTIONS ON OBSERVATION CAPABILITY OF AMERICAN PERSONNEL. EMBASSY HAS REGULARLY TRANSMITTED FOOD SUPPLY OBSERVATIONS AND REPORTS (CONFIRMED AND UNCONFIRMED) AND EVEN IMPORTANT RUMORS BECAUSE THESE CAN GIVE SOME SELECTIVE FLAVOR OF ATTITUDES AND, IN CONDITIONS OF SOVIET SOCIETY, OFTEN HAVE A FACTUAL BASE. THERE CONTINUE TO BE INDICATIONS OF LOCAL, BUT PERHAPS WIDESPREAD, SHORTAGES OF MAINLY MEAT AND VEGETABLES, WITH SITUATION MORE UNFAVORABLE IN VILLAGES AND SMALLER CITIES IN CERTAIN LOCALITIES THAN IN MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS. A RECAP OF THE INDICATIONS OF THIS SITUATION AVAILABLE TO US AND OUR COMMENTS ON SOME OF THE CAUSES FOLLOW.

2. A KNOWLEDGEABLE SOVIET AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST TOLD US MARCH 9 THAT THE MEAT SITUATION IN THE USSR MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO RETURN TO "NORMAL" IN ABOUT SIX MONTHS. AMCONSUL LENINGRAD REPORTED SHORTAGES OF MEAT, SAUSAGE AND POTATOES IN MINSK AND PSKOV IN MID FEBRUARY (REF A). A RECENT EMBASSY VISITOR TO
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TALLINN AND RIGA LIKEWISE FOUND MEAT, VEGETABLE AND POTATO SHORTAGES (REF B). ON AN EARLIER TRIP IN FEBRUARY, A DAO FOUND ADEQUATE MEAT SUPPLIES IN RIGA, MAINLY PORK, BUT VENTSPILS WAS BARREN OF MEAT. EMBASSY TRAVELLERS TO NOVOSIBIRSK, AKADEMGORODOK AND IRKUTSK IN LATE FEBRUARY FOUND MEAT, VIRTUALLY UNAVAILABLE AND POOR SUPPLIES OF POTATOES; THERE WERE ADEQUATE VEGETABLE SUPPLIES IN IRKUTSK BUT VIRTUALLY NONE IN NOVOSIBIRSK. A SOVIET SOURCE RECENTLY TOLD A DAO THAT KOMSOMOLSK-ON-AMUR WAS THE "GOROD GOLODA," THE CITY OF HUNGER, AS NO MEAT AND VEGETABLES HAD BEEN AVAILABLE FOR MONTHS. AMOTHER REPORT (DIA NUMBER 2-214-0068-77) BASED ON SOVIET SOURCES CONTACTED IN JANUARY-FEBRUARY FOUND SERIOUS MEAT AND FOOD SHORTAGES IN CITIES IN THE KAZAKH, KIRGHIZ, LATVIAN, LITHUANIAN, AND MOLDAVIAN REPUBLICS, AND IN THE NORTHERN PARTS OF THE RUSSIAN REPLUBLIC, I.E., YAROSLAV, PERMSK OBLAST, AND ARKHANGELSK. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SITUATION IN THE UKRAINE WAS MIXED, WITH SOME OBLASTS, DONETSK AND ODESSA, ALL APPARENTLY HAVING GOOD SUPPLIES.

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R 111237Z MAR 77 CCY OF PARA 3 OF TEXT

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4963

INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CORRECTION TO PARA 3 OF TEXT)

3. THERE HAVE BEEN UNCONFIRMED REPORTS CONCERNING UNREST
OVER THE FOOD SITUATION. EARLIER WE REPORTED ONE INDICATION
THAT THE BREZHNEV SPEECH IN TULA ON JANUARY 18 WAS PROMPTED
BY ACTIVE WORKER DISSATISFACTION WITH THE LACK OF GOODS (REF C).
ON FEBRUARY 24 LE MONDE CORRESPONDENT AMALRIC AND YUGOSLAV POLITI-
CAL COUNSELOR DJUKIC BOTH TOLD POL COUNSELOR THAT THEIR SOURCES
HAD INDICATED TO THEM SEVERE SHORTAGES OF MEAT AND IN SOME
INSTANCES POTATOES EXIST OUTSIDE MOSCOW. BOTH LINKED THESE AND
OTHER FOOD SHORTAGES WITH UNREST AT TULA, WHICH THEY SAID HAD
INCLUDED WORK STOPPAGES. AMALRIC ALSO CITED SHORTAGES AT
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VOLOGDA (AN AREA KNOWN FOR ITS HIGH-QUALITY BUTTER) WHICH

CONTRIBUTED TO DEMONSTRATIONS AT A LOCAL PARTY MEETING WHICH WAS FINALLY DISPERSED BY MILITIA. HE ALSO REFERRED TO SIMILAR (UNSPECIFIED CASES) UNREST IN BELORUSSIA AND CHARACTERIZED IT THERE AS THE "POLISH VIRUS." AMALRIC ALSO STATED THAT RECENTLY HE HAD BEEN INVITED TO A RUSSIAN DACHA ABOUT 60 KILOMETERS OUTSIDE MOSCOW WITH THE PRIVISO THAT HE BRING MEAT AND POTATOES. DJUKIC SAID THAT STUDENTS AT THE MOSCOW INSTITUTE OF ENERGETICS RETURNING FROM WINTER HOLIDAYS HAD REPORTED SEVERE MEAT SHORTAGES IN OUTLYING AREAS. WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS OF UNREST IN LATVIA OVER THE FOOD SITUATION. SOME WEEKS AGO THERE WAS ALSO AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT WORKERS IN KRASNOMAISKIY HAD REFUSED TO WORK UNTIL THEY WERE SUPPLIED MEAT AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS SAID TO HAVE IMMEDIATELY SHIPPED IN YUGOSLAV POULTRY "BY AIR". ON THE OTHER HAND, A QUICK CHECK OF THREE OTHER WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS YIELDED NO NEW CONSCIOUSNESS ON THE SUBJECT OF FOOD.

4. PERIODIC OBSERVATIONS BY EMBASSY OFFICER AT MOSCOW RAILWAY STATIONS INDICATE MANY PEOPLE COMING INTO THE CITY FROM OUTLYING AREAS TO PURCHASE FOOD, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE IT IS IN DEFICIENT SUPPLY AT HOME. SOME OTHER OBSERVERS CONSIDER THIS PHENOMENON MORE STRIKING THIS YEAR THAN LAST. MOSCOW AUTHORITIES ARE ALSO SAID TO HAVE IMPOSED A SECOND NON-MEAT DAY IN RESTAURANTS EACH WEEK. IF TRUE - AND WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO VERIFY THIS-- THIS HAS PROBABLY BEEN INSTITUTED ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY AND IS INDICATIVE OF FURTHER NEED AND EFFORTS TO STRETCH MEAT SUPPLIES. ON THE OTHER HAND, MOSCOW'S COLLECTIVE MARKETS GENERALLY SEEM WELL STOCKED AND ARE NO MORE CROWDED THAN USUAL.

5. THE PICTURE IS NOT UNIFORM. THE UZBEK SSR FOOD SITUATION IS QUITE ADEQUATE ACCORDING TO SOVIET SOURCES. RECENTLY EMBASSY OFFICERS HAVE VISITED THE CENTRAL MARKETS IN SUCH MAJOR CITIES AS BAKU, YEREVAN, TASHKENT, AND SAMARKAND AND FOUND GOOD MEAT, VEGETABLES, AND FRUIT SUPPLIES.

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6. COMMENT: THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PRESENT FOOD SUPPLY SITUATION ARE SEVERAL. WINTER TRADITIONALLY IS A DIFFICULT TIME FOR THE SOVIET CONSUMER AS THE FLAWS IN THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM BECOME EXACERBATED, PARTICULARLY IN NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS WHICH ARE NOT AGRICULTURALLY STRONG. CHANNELS ARE OF COURSE BETTER DEVELOPED TO MOVE PRODUCTS TOWARD MAJOR CITIES THAN THEY ARE TO REDISTRIBUTE THEM ELSEWHERE. MEAT AVAILABILITIES, ALTHOUGH PROBABLY UP FROM THE MID-1976 LEVELS, ARE BELOW 1975 LEVELS PARTICULARLY PEAK SUPPLIES FOLLOWING THE LATE 1975 DISTRESS SLAUGHTERINGS WHICH TEMPORARILY ENHANCED LAST WINTER'S SUPPLY. VEGETABLES WERE BADLY AFFECTED BY THE MID-OCTOBER FREEZE. DISTRIBUTION PRACTICE, MAINLY FOR POLITICAL REASONS, GIVES PRIORITY TO SUPPLY OF THE MAJOR CITIES. EVEN SO, CABBAGE

AND POTATOES ARE SOMETIMES UNABILABLE AT OBSERVED MOSCOW STATE OUTLETS. A GENERALLY INEFFICIENT DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM CAN OF COURSE EXPLAIN SUCH PROBLEMS AND THIS YEAR, FURTHERMORE, TRANSPORTATION HAS BEEN SUCH A PROBLEM THAT THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE RAILROADS HAS BEEN PUBLICILY CRITICIZED.

7. THE LIMITED SCOPE AND RELIABILITY OF INFORMATION AND THE RESTRICTIONS PLACED ON OBSERVATION LIMIT OUR ABILITY TO ASSESS AUTHROITATIVELY THE OVERALL SOVIET FOOD SITUATION. WE CONCLUDE FROM COMMENTS WE HAVE HEARD, MANIFESTATIONS WE HAVE OBSERVED, CONTINUED SOVIET MEAT IMPORTS, APPARENT LIMITATIONS ON CONSUMPTION, ETD., HOWEVER, THAT THER HAS BEEN A CONTINUING PROBLEM WHICH IS EXACERBATED IN SOME AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. THE FACT THAT THIS HAS APPARENTLY NOT PRESENTED A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE REGIME STEMS IN PART FROM THE POWER WHICH THE LATTER POSSESSES TO INTIMIDATE OR SUPRESS MANIFESTATIONS OF DISCONTENT. SOME SOVIET OFFICIALS DENY THAT THERE IS A SHORTAGE, WHEREAS OTHERS SAY THAT IS IS ON THE WAY TO SOLUTION. WHATEVER THE DEGREE TO WHICH A FOOD SHORTAGE EXISTS, WE SEE NO INDICATION THAT IT PRESENTS A SEROUS AND CURRENT POLITICAL DANGER TO THE SYSTEM.

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